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ABSTRACT

Gender role stereotypes are rigid beliefs in and applications of expected roles to almost all females and males. Female gender roles often include being expressive, communal, weak, emotional, caring, dependent, and working in traditional occupations. Educationally, women's appropriate roles serve to limit their future choices. Married women are expected to take the role of primary caregiver to their children, even at the expense of their own career. Evidence today for the existence of bias is consistent in showing that stereotyped attitudes are being held by school counselors. With the goal of gender equity in counseling in sight, continued biases against women frustrate and restrict women's participation in non-traditional education and career fields. Research on counseling the career concerns of women consistently reflects some level of school counselor bias. The socioeconomic impact of gender bias is not limited to the individual: society suffers as well. For attitudinal change to take place in school counselors, intervention occurs in several areas: school counselor training programs; school counselor inservice education for practicing school counselors; and active self-monitoring by the school counselor. School counselors must take their new found awareness of gender role stereotypes and share it with the youth. Determined action in the counseling session, in the classroom, and in the community are necessary to expose students to non-stereotypical role models and experiences for a better, less limiting future for the young women. (ABL)

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The Existence of Gender Biased Counseling of Female Students by High School Guidance Counselors.

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RUNNING HEAD: Gender Bias

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The Existence of Gender Biased Counseling of Female Students by High School Guidance Counselors.

Why did the dumb blond jump the chain link fence?
- Because she wanted to see what was on the other side.

While in a local public library, a woman was overhead telling this "joke" to her companion, pointing out a shadier side of American Society: stereotypical attitudes about women. Women are at times stereotyped as flighty, emotional and in this particular case, just plain stupid. These are inaccurate attributions about women and their abilities. Further, a recent article in the Tallahassee Democrat outlines a grim picture for today's working woman. Women with four years of post-secondary education will earn approximately the same as a man with a high school diploma. Women earn less than their male counterparts at the same educational level and traditionally female occupations consistently pay lower salaries than comparable male occupations ("Women aren't," 1991). This trend of occupational bias against women is well documented in current research (Klein, 1985; Hopkins-Best, 1987; Sauter, Seidl & Karbon, 1980). This paper will discuss gender bias in four sections: (1) define and discuss gender bias, (2) assess evidence of school counselor bias, (3) the ramifications of gender bias and (4) possible interventions.

Gender Bias

Gender role stereotypes are rigid beliefs in and applications of expected roles to almost all females and males. Female gender roles often include being expressive, communal, weak, emotional, caring, dependent and to work in traditional occupations (Klein, 1985). Educationally, women's appropriate roles serve to limit

their future choices. A good example of socialization in education is the math anxiety phenomenon. Female students often engage in success avoidance resulting in declining performance in math and science courses, areas traditionally reserved for males (Karpicke, 1980). The career life aspirations of women have been given the same treatment. There are traditional and more appropriate career life choices for women and less appropriate career life choices for women. The stereotypical occupations best suited for women are in three categories: clerical and secretarial; educational and social services; and nursing and home care (Klein, 1985). Hopkins-Best (1987) found the following rated as most appropriate career choices for female high school graduates: receptionist, library assistant, beautician, teacher's aid, special education teacher, occupational therapist and secretary. Women are, therefore, stereotyped into supervised, semi-skilled and low paying jobs. Finally, married women are expected to take the role of primary care giver to her children, even at the expense of her own career.

Evidence of School Counselor Bias

Evidence today for the existence of bias is consistent in showing stereotyped attitudes are being held by school counselors. With the goal of gender equity in counseling in sight, continued biases against women frustrate and restrict women's participation in non-traditional education and career fields.

Teresa Buczek (1981) examined the perception and retention of client concerns by school counselors based on gender of the client. Of her findings, three are of interest at this point. First, there was no significant bias against female clients reported.

Counselors were equally responsive to female client's vocational concerns. Second, male counselors asked female clients more social and family oriented questions. Third, both male and female counselors remembered less about their female clients. These results are interesting in that on one hand no significant bias is reported. Yet, a certain amount of stereotypical behavior and bias is evidenced by the nature of the questions male counselors asked their female clients. Buczek brings up an important variable to consider when assessing counselor bias. The counselor's awareness of the socially correct responses may enable the respondent to "fake good" on surveys or questionnaires, successfully masking their true attitudes and beliefs. When followed by an account of actual client contact, counselor behavior may actually display significant bias.

Karpicke (1980) found differential perceptions, held by the counselor, of client's success avoidance; client's role conflict; and others influence on the client based on the gender of the client. Of the counselors questioned, all felt that the female clients experienced more intense problem situations in these three areas than the clients expressed experiencing. This suggests stereotypical assumptions about what issues women deal with in counseling.

Another group of researchers assessed the interaction of client gender and attractiveness and resultant school counselor judgements. Mercado & Atkinson (1982) also found differential results. Focusing on school counselor influence on post-high school education of female students, no bias was evidenced.

However, a disturbing trend of bias become evidenced while the students were being counseled on coursework. Results found that male students were more likely than female students to be advised towards the traditional areas of mathematics and hard sciences in planning their curriculum. School counselors were also shown to possess stereotypical attitudes towards occupational appropriateness based on gender. Traditional male occupations were more often suggested for males than for females. These findings create particular concern for bias in the vocational guidance of post-secondary school students and the possibility of resultant limitations for women in the labor force.

Research on counseling the career concerns of women consistently reflects some level of school counselor bias. Research has focused on the methods and materials used and the occurrence of gender typed guidance counseling (Sauter et al., 1980; Karpicke,1980). The high school guidance process has been found to be more influential for women choosing traditional career paths. Women exploring traditional occupations received more information on their career choice and salary ranges than women inquiring about non-traditional career paths (Sauter et al., 1980). Additionally, a review of the same counseling experience revealed the absence of female role models in non-traditional occupations; the presence of gender-typed guidance materials; and counseling behavior biased along gender lines.

Directly linked to the career life concerns of women are studies (Hopkins-Best, 1987; Haring & Beyard-Tyler, 1984; Sauter et al., 1980) showing delineation of guidance counseling along traditional

lines. The occupational choices most appropriate for women, as described in these studies, all share commonalities: they are usually semi-skilled positions; supervised positions; or low paying positions. Examples are receptionist, library assistant, occupational therapist, teacher and secretary. These findings are consistent with a propensity to be more positive and encouraging to women with traditional career aspirations, while being more egalitarian to other aspects of femininity. That is, attitudes towards gender equity in counseling are improving, but there still are "male" occupations and "female" occupations, a different but equal phenomenon.

Ramifications of Gender Bias

The socio-economic impact of gender bias is not limited to the individual, society suffers as well. The individual female victim of gender biased guidance counseling is negatively impacted in several areas. The lack of value free counseling and encouragement of career life issues creates a variety of problems. A biased school counselor fails to expose his/her client to experiences including the reality of sexism in society and women performing in non-traditional roles. In curriculum planning, women are not encouraged in nontraditional directions. These summate to severely limit choices in future planning. The self-concept integration of high school teens is crucial to their development. An inner sense of direction and identity is forming during this developmental period. Stereotypical attitudes attack the healthy formation of self-concept by bottle-necking options, narrowing the individual's direction and lowering self-concept itself (Klein, 1985).

The difficulty women are likely to experience with life role conflicts, like Super's Rainbow of mother, student, and spouse, worker is exacerbated by gender biases. Conflicts between traditional occupational roles and desire for non-traditional occupational roles arise. Perceived appropriateness of occupations is influential to female clients. A female client may desire to follow a non-traditional career path such as engineering or police work, however societal, parental and school counselor pressures may result in the person following a more traditional path in teaching or nursing (Sauter et al., 1980). The result is a mismatch between the individual personality and the environment, leading to work dissatisfaction. What traditional roles expect, the woman may not be willing to give and is once again put under pressure to conform.

The societal losses are a product of its own biases. When a young woman is counseled along stereotypical standards and channeled away from non-traditional occupations, the society loses the untapped potential for performance from that woman. The absence of female role models functioning in non-traditional occupation is a cause and result of biased counseling. Young women today are not exposed to successful females acting in non-traditional roles and continued biased counseling could propagate this lack of role models for the future. The absence of female role models is not only damaging to the female portion of society, but is damaging to all of society. Male youths are missing exposure to crossed gender experiences which contributes to future stereotyping. Finally, the labor force is operating with a list, with a lopsided, male dominated culture. Pay inequities and

differential advancement in the labor force are existent today and will continue until stereotyped thinking is challenged. The most important point to remember at this time is that society as a whole suffers; role models are lost, economic and intellectual potential are lost and future growth is inhibited by the gender stereotyping of women.

Solutions

For attitudinal change to take place in school counselors, intervention occurs in several areas: school counselor training programs; school counselor inservice education for practicing school counselors; and active self-monitoring by the school counselor. In school counselor training programs, the trainee should be challenged to explore their own prejudices, stereotypes and values. The goal of exploration is awareness; change and management of values and beliefs; and how they influence the counseling session. Exposure to astereotypical information and to women functioning in non-traditional roles is needed as well. Several groups of researchers (Scott & McMillan, 1980; Moore & Nelson, 1991) have offered some areas of intervention at this level. School counselor trainee programs should: (1) help in developing an understanding of bias and how attitudes, values and beliefs influence biases, (2) assess gender fair counseling, (3) model gender fair school counselors in practice, (4) assess the existence of biased educational materials, (5) expose trainees to both gender biased and androgynous counseling role play sessions and (6) actively provide cross gender modeling experiences for the students. The goal of such interventions is to expose trainees to

non-traditional gender experiences in order to confront stereotyped beliefs. As the school counselor graduates, these individuals are expected to practice and work to bring about change in their community.

School counselor inservice education is a popular way for practicing school counselors to keep in touch with their profession. In addition to being a method that keeps skills sharp, inservice programs can be a medium for presenting non-gender biased material and to confront biased practice. Through facilitating school counselor awareness of biased practice, the inservice program hopes to deter biased counseling. Thomas, Moore & Sams (1980) address gender equality in counseling through a school counselor renewal workshop model. The objectives were to increase the attending school counselor's awareness in areas such as: perceptions of appropriate gender roles, knowledge of attitudes and values, how attitudes can influence the counseling relationship and effective techniques for counseling females. Through a conglomeration of role plays; group activities; gender bias assessment; information giving lectures and questionnaires; the participants showed a marked increase in the awareness of gender bias, its consequences and to come in contact with their own prejudices and how they influence the session.

Once trained and inservice work shops attended, the school counselor must practice what they preach. This means constant vigilance of their own methods, critical analysis of materials used and solicitation of non-gender biased resources. The school counselor should assess the equitable nature of their work by

asking themselves several questions: (1) do all students receive equal exposure and encouragement to guidance counseling regardless of gender, (2) are the assessment materials used appropriate and free of gender bias, (3) are career guidance opportunities open to all regardless of gender, (4) do the guidance materials used propagate gender biased roles and (5) are all students given equal access to employee referrals (Hopkins-Best, 1987)? Throughout the entire guidance counseling experience, school counselors must solicit women who are performing in non-traditional roles and expose students as well as teachers to these individuals. Nonbiased counseling also must bleed over to nonbiased teaching. Finally, the school counselor should actively work to overcome their students gender stereotypes as well as their own. Many of the methods listed above, workshops, information, modeling and role plays, are effective in increasing awareness in their students.

Conclusion

In todays society, women have been making great strides towards more equitable positioning with men. However, the presence of stereotyped beliefs and traditional values are still very strong. There are clear cut expectations of what females are supposed to be in this world. Career wise, women should be teachers, school counselors, nurses and secretaries with less responsibility and compensation. In dual career families, the female partner is expected to be primary caregiver to the children and housekeeper for the husband. Truly equitable marriages are the exception rather than the rule. School counselors can exacerbate gender bias whether, intentionally or unintentionally, by working within the

confines of stereotypes. It then becomes the school counselor's responsibility to challenge their own values and beliefs as well as those around them. School counselors are able to conduct their own workshops for fellow school counselors and teachers and students.

The recent research and work towards gender equity are large steps in creating a more androgynous society. These are, however, only the first steps on a long road. The point at which to change tomorrow is with today's children. School counselors must take their new found awareness of gender role stereotypes and share it with the youth. Determined action in the counseling session, in the classroom and in the community are necessary to expose students to astereotypical role models and experiences for a better, less limiting future for the young women.

A final word of caution in the challenging of traditional values. Respect those who honestly are working out of traditional values, not out of stereotypes. As a school counselor, explore the clients value systems to assess if they are responding to external stereotypes and biases or from their values. If the former, provide astereotypical interventions as necessary. However, if the client really wants to become a teacher or secretary, do not force them elsewhere. The end result is pushing your own prejudices onto another person, doing so in the name of gender equity makes it no less condemning.

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